

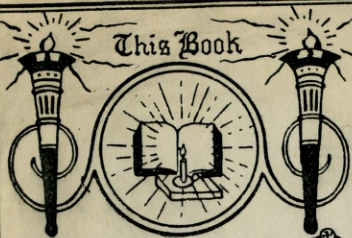
H. P. BLAVATSKY

AN OUTLINE OF HER LIFE

HERBERT WHYTE

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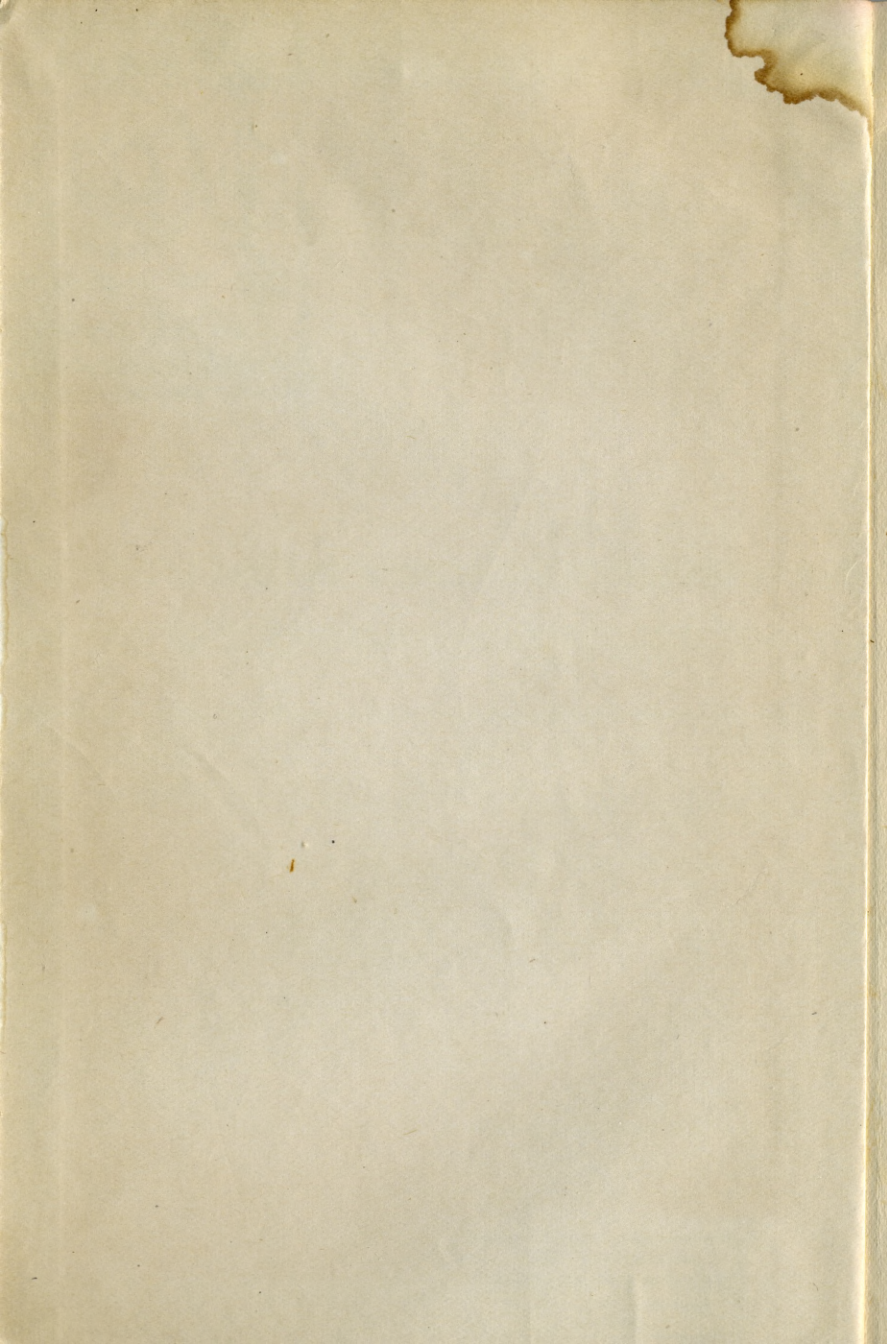
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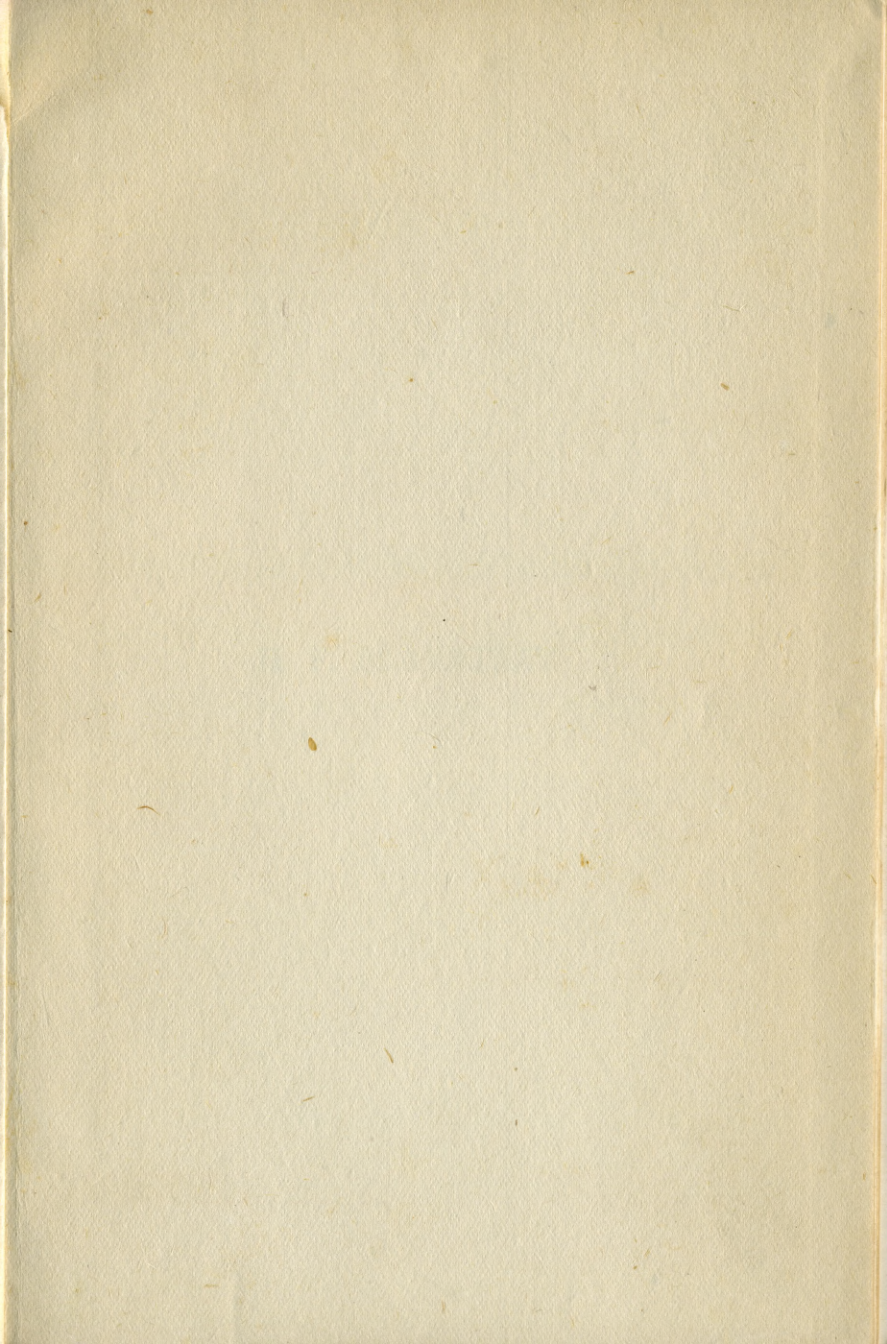


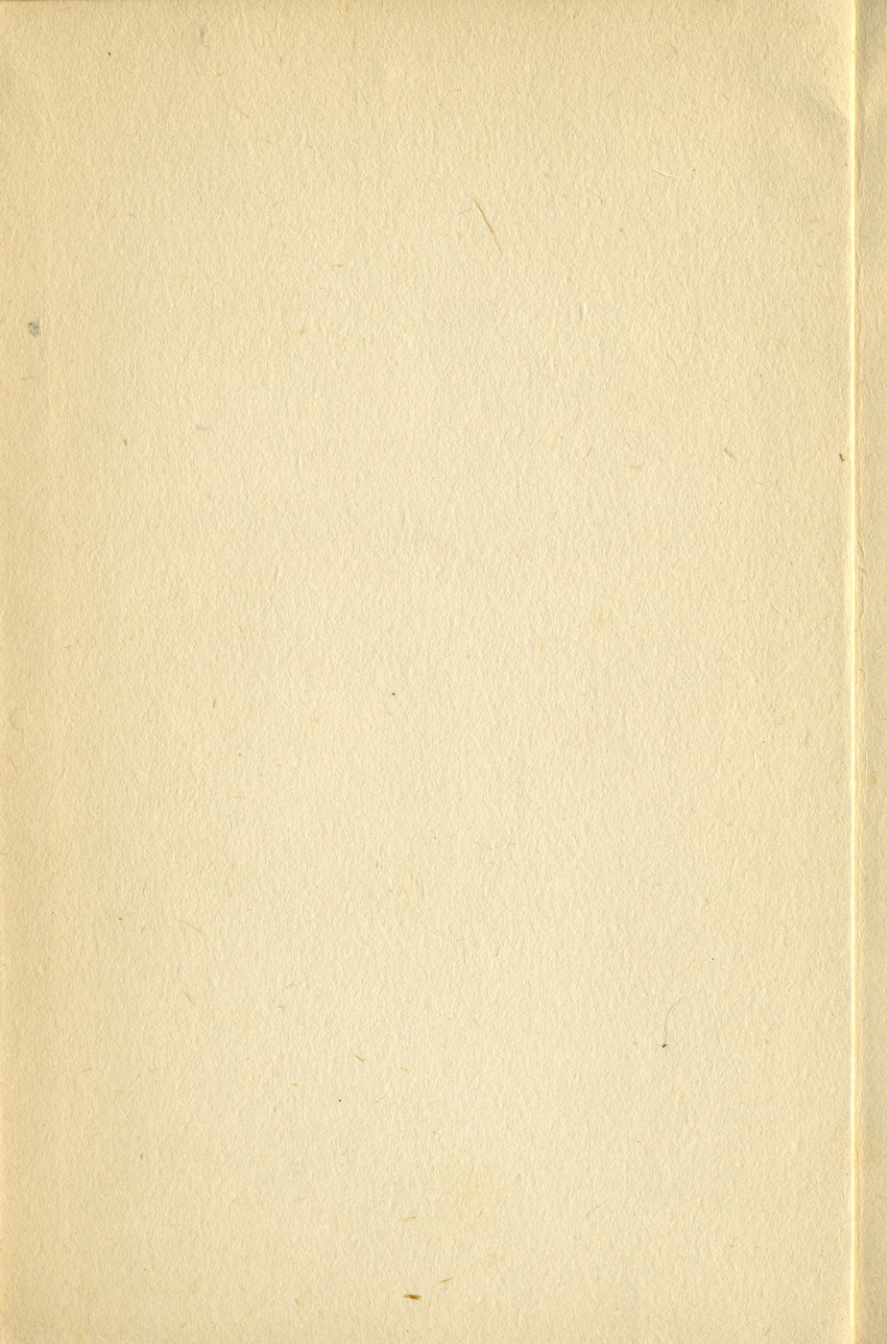
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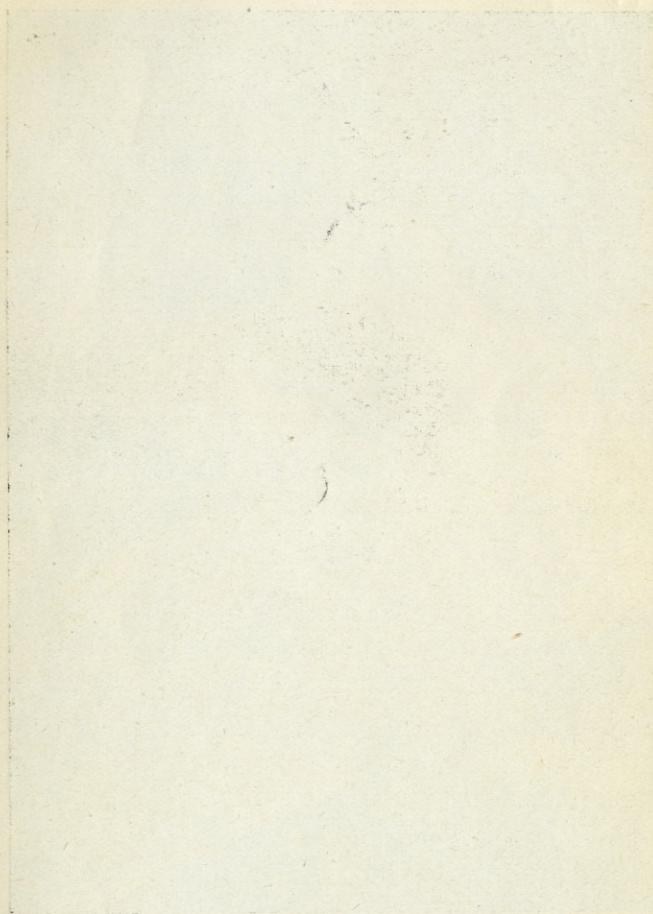






H. P. BLAVATSKY

BY B. BEAUVISSE





H. P. BLAVATSKY

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H. P. BLAVATSKY

AN OUTLINE OF HER LIFE

BY

HERBERT WHYTE

WITH A PREFACE BY

C. W. LEADBEATER

(Second Edition)

THEOSOPHICAL PUBLISHING HOUSE

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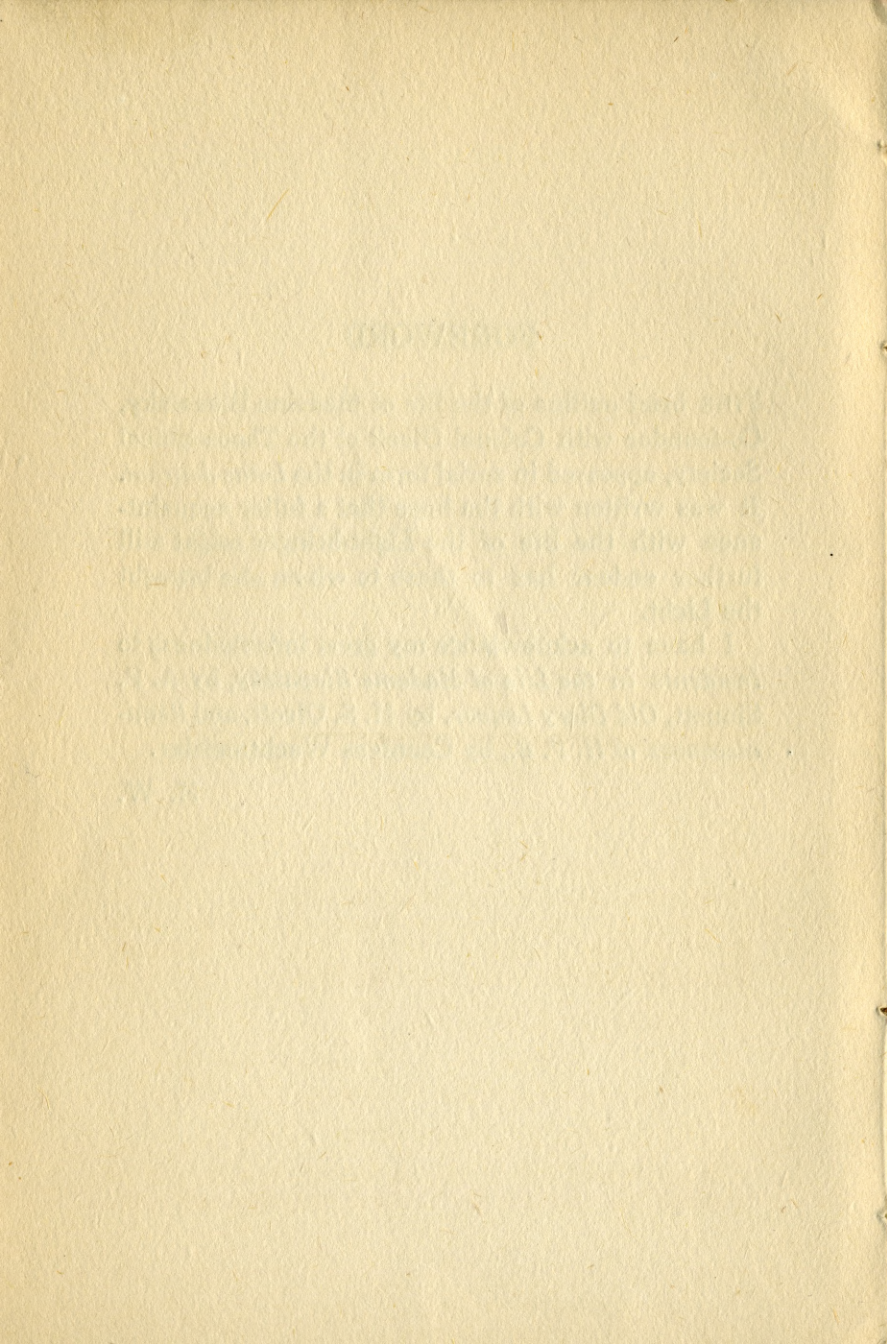
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FOREWORD

THIS brief outline of the life of Madame Blavatsky, Co-founder with Colonel Olcott of the Theosophical Society, appeared in serial form in the *Lotus Journal*. It was written with the hope that a fuller acquaintance with the life of the Light-bringer might still further endear her to those to whom she brought the Light.

I have to acknowledge my great indebtedness to *Incidents in the Life of Madame Blavatsky*, by A. P. Sinnett, *Old Diary Leaves*, by H. S. Olcott, and *Reminiscences of H. P. B.*, by Countess Wachtmeister.

H. W.



PREFACE

THE very first news that I ever heard of our great Founder, Madame Blavatsky, was curious and characteristic, and the hearing of it was a most important event in my life, though I did not know it then. A staunch friend of my school days took up the sea-life as his profession, and about the year 1879 he was second officer on board one of the coasting vessels of the British India Steam Navigation Co. On her voyage from Bombay to Colombo Madame Blavatsky happened to travel by that steamer, and thus my friend was brought into contact with that marvellous personality.

He told me two very curious stories about her. It seems that one evening he was on deck trying vainly to light a pipe in a high wind. Being on duty he could not leave the deck, so he struck match after match, only to see the flame instantly extinguished by the gale. Finally, with an expression of impatience, he abandoned the attempt. As he straightened himself he saw just below him a dark form closely wrapped in a cloak, and Madame Blavatsky's clear voice called to him :

"Cannot you light it, then ?"

"No," he replied, "I do not believe that any one could keep a match alight in such a wind as this."

"Try once more," said Madame Blavatsky.

He laughed, but he struck another match, and he assures me that, in the midst of that gale and quite

unprotected from it, that match burnt with a steady flame clear down to the fingers that held it. He was so astounded that he quite forgot to light his pipe after all, but H.P.B. only laughed and turned away.

On another occasion during the voyage the first officer made, in Madame Blavatsky's presence, some casual reference to what he would do on the return voyage from Calcutta. (The steamers go round the coast from Bombay to Calcutta and back again.) She interrupted him, saying :

"No, you will not do that, for you will not make the return voyage at all. When you reach Calcutta you will be appointed captain of another steamer, and you will go in quite a different direction."

"Madame," said the first officer, "I wish with all my heart you might be right, but it is impossible. It is true I hold a captain's certificate, but there are many before me on the list for promotion. Besides, I have signed an agreement to serve on this coasting run for five years."

"All that does not matter," replied Madame Blavatsky; "you will find it will all happen as I tell you."

And *it did*; for when that steamer reached Calcutta it was found that an unexpected vacancy had occurred (I think through the sudden death of a captain), and there was no one at hand who could fill it but that same first officer. So the prophecy which had seemed so impossible was literally fulfilled.

These were points of no great importance in themselves, but they implied a great deal, and their influence on me was in an indirect manner very great. For in less than a year after that conversation, Mr. Sinnett's book, *The Occult World*, fell into

my hands, and as soon as I saw Madame Blavatsky's name mentioned in it I at once recalled the stories related to me by my earliest friend. Naturally the strong first-hand evidence which I had already had of her phenomenal powers predisposed me to admit the possibility of these other strange new things of which Mr. Sinnett wrote, and thus those two little stories played no unimportant part in my life, since they prepared me for the instant and eager acceptance of Theosophical truth.

It was in 1884 that I first had the privilege of meeting Madame Blavatsky, and before the end of that year I was travelling from Egypt to India with her in the S.S. *Navarino*. The training through which she put her pupils was somewhat severe, but remarkably effective; I can testify to certain radical changes which her drastic methods produced in *me* in a very short space of time—also to the fact that they have been permanent!

I think I ought also to bear witness to the genuineness of those phenomena about which such a storm of controversy has raged. I had the opportunity of seeing several such happenings under circumstances which rendered any theory of fraud absolutely untenable, even at that time, when I did not in the least understand how such things could be. Now, as the result of later study, I know the methods which she must have employed, and what was then so incomprehensible appears perfectly simple.

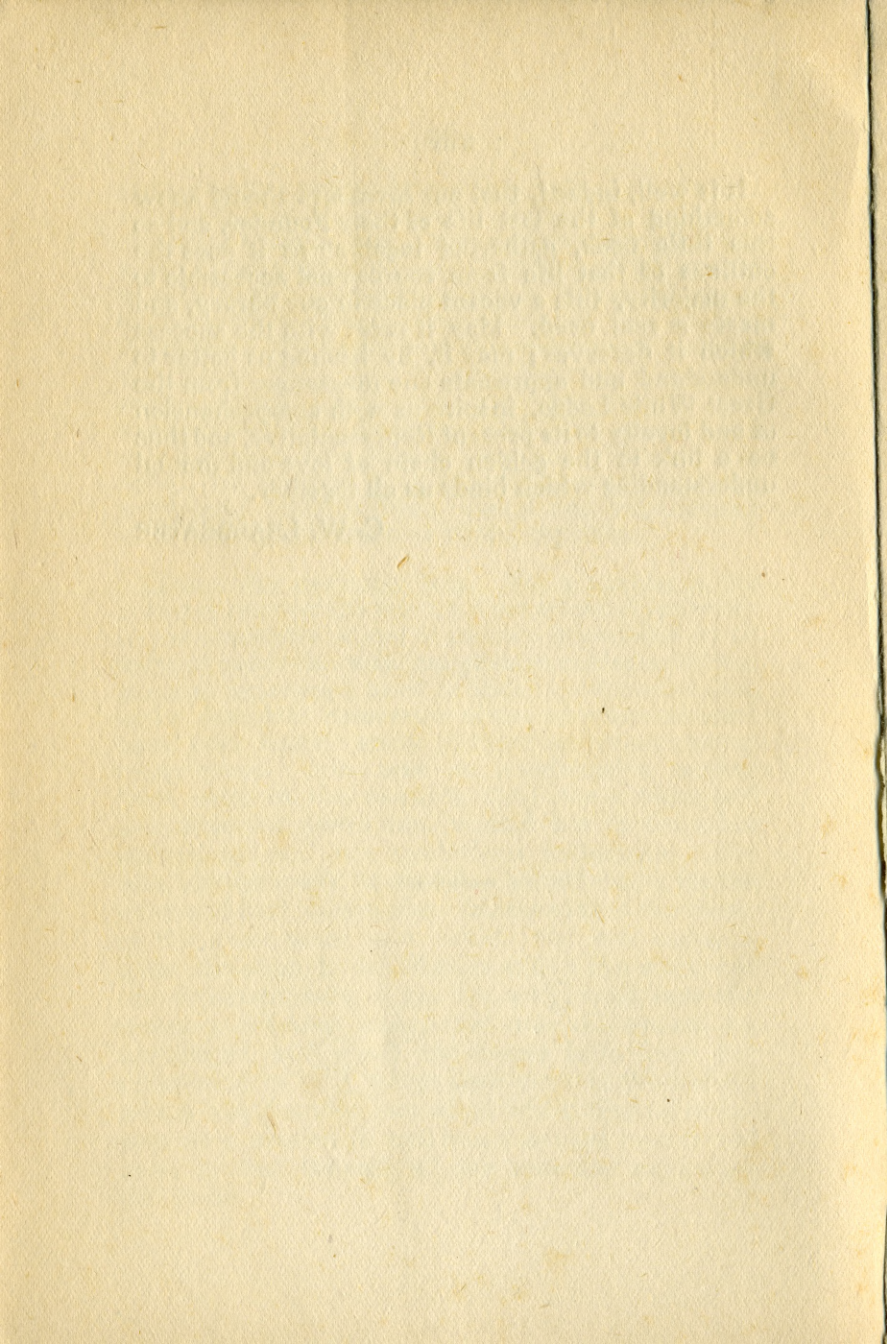
If I were asked to mention Madame Blavatsky's most prominent characteristic, I should unhesitatingly reply "Power". Apart from the great Masters of Wisdom, I have never known any person from whom power so visibly radiated. Any man who was introduced to her at once felt himself in the presence of a tremendous force—to which he was

quite unaccustomed ; he realised with disconcerting vividness that those wonderful pale blue eyes saw clearly through him, and not infrequently she would soon drop some casual remark which proved to him that his apprehensions in that regard were well founded. Some people did not like to find themselves thus unexpectedly transparent, and for that reason they cordially hated Madame Blavatsky, while others loved—and love—her with whole-hearted devotion, knowing well how much they owe her and how great is the work which she has done. So forceful was she that no one ever felt indifferent towards her ; every one experienced either strong attraction or strong repulsion.

Clever she certainly was. Not a scholar in the ordinary sense of the word, yet possessed of apparently inexhaustible stores of unusual knowledge on all sorts of out-of-the-way, unexpected subjects. Witty, quick at repartee, a most brilliant conversationalist, and a dramatic *raconteuse* of the weirdest stories I have ever heard—many of them her own personal experiences. She was an indefatigable worker from early in the morning until late at night, and she expected every one around her to share her enthusiasm and her marvellous endurance. She was always ready to sacrifice herself—and, for the matter of that, others also—for the sake of the cause, of the great work upon which she was engaged. Utter devotion to her Master and to His work was the dominant note of her life, and though now she wears a different body, that note still sounds out unchanged, and when she comes forth from her retirement to take charge once more of the Society which she founded, we shall find it ringing in our ears as a clarion to call round her old friends and new, so that through all the ages that work shall still go on.

It is well, indeed, that our members should know something of the last life of their Founder, and so this little book, gathering together as it does the outlines of that life from sources not accessible to the majority, fills a vacant place in our library, and meets a real need. May it meet with the success which it deserves; may it, by leading us better to understand and appreciate one messenger from the Great White Lodge, inspire us with comprehension of and loyalty to its present Representative, and thus be a link in the golden chain of love and mutual understanding which binds us all together.

C. W. LEADBEATER



CHAPTER I

CHILDHOOD

1831—1844 ¹

THE powerful, strongly-marked face of the co-founder of the Theosophical Society must be familiar to many, as her portrait is to be found in most of the Society's meeting-rooms, and has been printed in many places. But how few know the story of her arduous life! No one knows it fully, nor is it anywhere completely recorded, save in the imperishable memory of nature, wherein the history of every life is preserved. Several books have, however, been written about Madame Blavatsky, and from them the following outline of her life is compiled.

Helena Petrovna Hahn was born at Ekaterinoslow in the South of Russia, in 1831. Her father, Col. Hahn, was an officer in the Russian army, who belonged to a noble family coming from Mecklenburg, Germany, and her mother, Helene Fadeef, who attained some fame as an authoress, was the daughter of Princess Dolgorouky, and so came of one of the oldest Russian aristocratic families.

The baby, whose career has meant so much to many of us, was born in the night between July 30th and 31st—a feeble little infant which was not

¹ Compiled from *Incidents in the Life of Madame Blavatsky*, A. P. Sinnett.

expected to live. They decided that it must be baptised at once, and so all the preparations were made for this important ceremony; a large room was selected and the whole household assembled, every one being provided with a burning taper which had to be held during the service. A little girl, the child-aunt of the baby, who was in the front row, grew very tired, and settled, unobserved, on the floor with her lighted taper in her hand; the sponsors were just in the act of renouncing the Evil One and his deeds, when they discovered that the long flowing robes of the priest had caught fire from the little girl's taper, and the poor old man was rather severely burnt. This was considered by the superstitious servants to be a bad omen, and a troubled and eventful life was predicted for poor little Helena Hahn.

Contrary to expectations the baby lived and grew up, although for some years her health was delicate; but it improved greatly, for at ten years of age she was a good rider, and at fifteen she could control any Cossack horse; a Cossack horse is generally considered to have a will and a way of its own, but so had Helena Hahn. She was daring, very lively, and full of humour, with a passionate love for everything unknown and mysterious, and a craving for independence and freedom of action.

The child's nurses were familiar with, and fully believed in all the legends and customs relating to the fairies and the goblins, and they were persuaded that Helena had some touch with the unseen worlds; thus on a certain day in July, each year, her nurse would carry her all round the establishment, and make her sprinkle the four corners with water, the nurse repeating mystic sentences the while. Sometimes, when she was older and understood her superiority better, little Helena would frighten the poor nurse by telling

1843



1848

her about these goblins, and so gain her own way when the nurse wished otherwise. For two or three years Helena and her younger sister went to stay with their father, and moved about with the soldiers of whom he had command; they were chiefly taken care of by their father's orderlies, and Helena, at least, greatly preferred them to her female nurses.

Before Helena was eleven her mother died and she was taken to live with her grandmother, Princess Dolgorouky, at Saratow, where she spent five years. The house was an old rambling castle-like place, with subterranean passages and weird nooks and corners; and there was a large park which joined on to the deep forest, full of shadows and sombre paths. Many legends were related about the old place, which Helena quickly learnt. Altogether it was a home that was likely still further to quicken that love of the mysterious which was already so strong a trait in her character. She was a highly-strung, sensitive girl, given to walking in her sleep, sometimes full of mischief, and at other times as assiduous at her lessons as an old scholar. For her all nature seemed animated with a mysterious life of its own; she heard the voice of every object and form; she talked with birds and animals, and had some means of her own for understanding them, while inanimate objects, such as certain stuffed specimens of seals and crocodiles, and old antediluvian monsters which the house contained, suggested endless romances to her lively imagination. Sometimes they were more than fancies which she wove round these objects, and often she would relate her stories to a group of younger children; seated on her favourite animal, a huge stuffed seal, she would repeat his adventures, as told her by himself, or tell the romance of a tall white flamingo, whose behaviour while alive had

left something to be desired, so that all the younger children grew quite afraid of him, even though he was stuffed. Her power of story-telling was remarkable, for she seemed actually to live in the events she was describing, and quite carried her audience away with her.

She made the acquaintance of an old man, a centenarian, who was popularly considered to be a wizard, but of a benevolent type, for he willingly cured those who applied to him in sickness, using herbs whose properties he well knew. He kept bees, and in the summer could be seen walking among his favourites and *covered* by them from head to foot, as by a living cloak, while he could put his hands into their hives with impunity; the buzzing of the bees would stop when he spoke in a curious way to them—evidently he and they understood one another. Helena visited this strange old man whenever possible, and listened with eager interest to all he had to say about the language of the birds and beasts.

Besides these unusual elements which were added to the ordinary events of her childhood, there was another influence of great importance which ought to be mentioned. At a very early period of her life Helena was aware of a Protector, invisible to all but herself, a man of imposing appearance, whose features never changed, and whom she met in after-life as a living man, and knew as though she had been brought up in his presence. This guardianship never forsook her throughout her life, as we shall see, and it showed itself even in her childhood, as the following stories will show.

When she was about fourteen a horse bolted with her; she fell with her foot entangled in the stirrup, and before the horse was stopped she ought to have been killed outright but for a strange sustaining power, which she distinctly felt around

her and which seemed to hold her up in defiance of gravitation.

When she was quite a small mite another surprising adventure befell her. She conceived a wish to inspect closely a picture which hung high on a wall with a curtain in front of it—a wish which was not responded to by her elders. So when the coast was clear, determined to carry out her design, she dragged a table to the wall, and contriving to place another small table upon that, and a chair on the top of all, she succeeded in mounting this unstable erection, and found she could just reach the picture by leaning with one hand on the dusty wall, while with the other she pulled back the curtain. The picture startled her, her slight movement upset her frail platform and . . . exactly what occurred she could not say. But she lost consciousness from the moment she began to fall, and when she recovered her senses was lying quite unhurt on the floor, the tables and chairs were in their usual places, the curtain was in front of the picture, and the only sign of her adventure was the mark of her small hand on the dusty wall, high up beside the picture.

There was one trait in our heroine's character which showed itself in her early youth, and remained with her all through her life, and that was her sympathy for those who were of a humbler station in life than herself. As a child, she always preferred to play with the servants' children rather than with her equals, and had constantly to be watched lest she should escape from the house and make friends with ragged street boys. So, later in life, she cared nothing for mere nobility of birth, and always was especially sympathetic towards those who were socially beneath her.

CHAPTER II
GIRLHOOD

1844—1853

IN 1844, Colonel Hahn took Helena to Paris and to London, one of the objects of the journey being to obtain for her some good music lessons, as she showed great natural abilities as a pianist—abilities which never altogether forsook her during later life, although they sometimes found no opportunity of expression for years together. The visit was not altogether a success, partly owing to our heroine's peculiarities of temperament, and she was disappointed to find that her knowledge of English was more imperfect than she had realised. She had learned from an English governess who hailed from Yorkshire and who had taught the English language with the broad o's and a's which distinguish the Yorkshire version of it, so that Mdle. Hahn's combination of Yorkshire and South Russian raised smiles among her English friends which she herself did not deem warranted by the substance of her remarks. It should be added, however, that before her next visit to England some years later, this defect had been remedied and the Russian linguistic ability had asserted itself, so that she spoke English well.

The marriage, in 1848, which transformed Made-moiselle Helena Hahn into Madame Blavatsky, came about in a somewhat curious way. She was an eagle in a nest of sparrows, and, as we have

seen, her difference of character had already appeared. She was "dared" by her governess to find any man who would be her husband, and she accepted the challenge. General Blavatsky, the governor of a Russian province, was quite an elderly man, of whom she had by no means a lofty opinion, but in three days' time she made him propose to her. Too late, she discovered that her joking acceptance was really a serious matter and that she would have to face all the consequences. The whole thing was nothing more than a girlish prank—she was only seventeen at the time—and perhaps its results were not much greater than those involved in the mere change of name. Her friends tried to impress upon her the solemnity of the step which she was about to take; her one desire was to break off the engagement so rashly made, but this was not listened to, and on the appointed day the marriage took place.

Before three months had passed the young bride resolved to leave her husband; she took horse and rode away from the country house in which they were spending the orthodox honeymoon. After some family counsels she set out to join her father, who had been far away in Russia with his regiment during the foregoing events, but during the journey she began to fear that Col. Hahn might insist upon her returning to General Blavatsky, so she decided to take the law into her own hands again and to give her escort—an old serving-man and a maid—the slip. Part of their journey was by ship to a place called Kertch; on reaching this port she sent the servants ashore to find apartments and prepare them for her. Then by a liberal outlay of roubles she persuaded the captain to sail away for his next port! It was an adventurous voyage for a girl of eighteen, for at the next port, in order to escape the harbour police, she had

to borrow the outfit of the cabin boy, who hid in the coal bunker! At Constantinople, however, she had the good fortune to meet a Russian lady of her acquaintance, with whom she safely travelled for some time. No complete record of these European travels exist; it appears that she visited Cairo, where she met an old man who had a considerable reputation as a magician, from whom she received some instruction; and in Paris she formed the acquaintance of a famous mesmerist, who discovered her wonderful psychic gifts and was eager to retain her as one of his sensitives. This was by no means to Madame's liking, and in order to escape his influence she quitted Paris hastily.

At about this time she paid her second visit to London, during which an important event occurred which Countess Wachtmeister relates.¹ We have already heard that, from her early childhood, our heroine was conscious of a guiding and guarding Presence, very dignified, very benignant, unseen to any save herself. She had learnt to think of this Presence as her Guardian and to feel that she was under His protection. One day, when she was out walking she saw a tall Hindu with some Indian princes. To her astonishment she recognised in him the Guardian whom she had already come to revere. Her first impulse was to rush forward and speak to him, but he made her a sign not to move, and she stood as if spellbound while he passed by. The next day she went to Hyde Park for a stroll, that she might be alone and free to think over her extraordinary adventure. Looking up, she saw the same dignified Hindu approaching her, this time with the purpose of meeting her and speaking to her. He explained that he had come to London with the Indian princes on an important mission, and that he was desirous of meeting her

¹ *Reminiscences of H. P. Blavatsky*, p. 56.

physically, as he wished to have her co-operation in a work which he was about to undertake. He then gave her some information as to the work she would be called upon to perform and told her that she would have many troubles and difficulties to face and also that she would have to spend three years in Tibet to prepare her for her work.

We have no written record of the impression this interview made upon the mind of our young heroine, but it is not difficult to realise that the meeting in the physical body with that Guardian whom she already knew in an interior way, and the counsel which she then received, must have had far-reaching consequences in her life. One is reminded of a rather similar occurrence in the life of another mystic—Jacob Böhme. A mysterious customer came one day when Jacob, then a lad, was alone in the shoemaker's shop where he was serving his apprenticeship; poor Jacob transacted the business as best he could, and then the stranger called him out and, taking him by the hand, told him briefly that he had great work to do in the world, and gave him good advice as to how he should prepare himself for it.

But the time for Madame Blavatsky's great work in the world was still far ahead and her intense love of adventure and dislike for any constraint were very strong. Her fancy led her to America in pursuit of North American Indians as she imagined them to be, after reading Fennimore Cooper's delightful stories. She was introduced to a party of Indians in some Canadian city and forthwith settled down for a long conference with them about their customs and the doings of their medicine men. Apparently she found the talk of their doings in the forest and wigwam so absorbing that their doings in her room escaped her observation; they departed, and with them certain of Madame Blavatsky's

belongings ! Disappointed in her hopes of the sons and daughters of the Wild West, she made her way to New Orleans, where the strange magical rites practised by a sect of West African negroes, known as Voodoos, excited her curiosity. These rites, however, were of a very undesirable character, and so she moved on to pastures new.

Mexico provided her with interesting material and also with the necessary number of adventures, without which no single year of her life was complete. It is wonderful that she passed unscathed through all these wanderings ; nothing stood her in such good stead as the magic of her own fearlessness. During these Mexican wanderings she resolved to go to India to try to meet again that Teacher whom she now knew physically. Strange as it may seem, she had already met two others who were bent on a similar quest ; one an Englishman and the other a Hindu. The three pilgrims, presumably in 1852, but that date is not certain, reached Bombay, where their paths separated. Madame Blavatsky did not succeed in her quest on this first occasion, only getting as far as Nepal, where she was compelled to turn back. She returned to England in 1853, but the preparations for the Crimean War offended her patriotic feelings, and she crossed to America, going this time to New York, and afterwards to the Far West and across the Rocky Mountains with emigrants' caravans, till she reached San Francisco, where she stayed for some time.

CHAPTER III

ADVENTURES AND WONDERS

1855—1867

AFTER waiting for two years in America, Madame Blavatsky again set out for the "burnished and mysterious East," which ever attracted her so strongly, and reached Calcutta in 1855. That she was able to travel about in this way was due to her father, with whom she kept in touch, and who provided her with the necessary funds at convenient opportunities; her other relatives never heard from her, as she wished to run no risks of being taken back to the household life in Russia, from which, as we have seen, she had cut herself free. As I have before remarked, it is as useless to look for a conformity to the ordinary conventions of life in *this* biography as to expect the career of an eagle to conform to the views of life held by a sparrow. With three companions Madame journeyed through Kashmir, under the guidance of a Tartar Shaman or monk; these men are often quite illiterate, but are sometimes well versed in certain forms of practical magic. Their aim was to penetrate into Tibet, but they had only proceeded sixteen miles, when two of them were politely escorted back to the frontier, while the third would-be explorer was stricken down with fever and had to return to India. Our heroine persevered, however, and invested with an appropriate disguise by the Shaman, pushed far into the "Forbidden Land".

Like the Abbé Huc, who was one of the earliest travellers to record his recollections of these little-known lands, Madame Blavatsky saw many strange things, and her interest in all forms of magic was amply gratified. Her friend, the Shaman, constantly carried a stone talisman under his arm which excited her curiosity, and in answer to her questions would only promise to explain when a convenient opportunity offered. One day when a certain ceremony had called all the people of the village away, Madame Blavatsky repeated her question about the talisman. The Shaman agreed to explain, but first he fixed up a goat's head at the entrance of the tent as a warning to the villagers that he was not to be disturbed. He then settled himself down and proceeded, as it seemed, to *swallow the stone*. Almost immediately he fell into a deep swoon and his body became rigid and cold. Here was a worthy situation for our adventure-loving heroine; in a tent in mid-Mongolia, with the sun sinking rapidly in the West, and the profoundest silence enveloping all—her sole companion an apparently lifeless Shaman. Is it any wonder that her thoughts turned to Russia and her friends? Presently, however, a deep voice spoke through the cold lips of her companion, asking what she would have. Madame was fairly collected, having seen such trances before and knowing something of their nature and possibilities. She therefore demanded that the invisible questioner who spoke through the body before her, should visit three of her friends. First she sent him to an old friend, a Roumanian lady of a somewhat mystic temperament, who was described as sitting in her garden reading a letter, which was dictated slowly to Madame Blavatsky, who wrote it down. Then in a corner of the tent the misty form of this old lady appeared for a few minutes. Months afterwards it was ascertained that on that very day and hour the old lady had

been quietly sitting in the garden reading a letter from her brother; it was this letter which the Shaman dictated to Madame Blavatsky. Suddenly the old lady fainted and remembered dreaming that she "saw Helen in a deserted place, under a gypsy's tent". For two hours the astral body of the entranced Shaman travelled at Madame's bidding, reporting to her as to far-distant friends and places. In particular she directed him to a friend possessed also of occult powers, asking for means of return to more civilised parts; a few hours later a party of twenty-five horsemen rode up and rescued her from the perilous situation in which she had involved herself.

After relating this adventure (see *Isis Unveiled*) Madame Blavatsky adds that while some may disbelieve her statements, others will see in them an interesting instance of the powers of the human soul when freed from the body as the Shaman was. He, of course, was only a medium, not a veritable adept. The story is also interesting as showing the invariable respect which Madame commanded among those who possessed partial control of some of the finer forces of Nature.

This incident put an end for the time being to her wanderings in Tibet; she was conducted back to the frontier and after some further travels in India was directed by her occult guardian to leave the country, shortly before the Mutiny which broke out in 1857.

Her family in Russia had heard nothing of her except the vaguest rumours; it was Christmas night, 1858, a wedding-party was in progress, when in the midst of the supper an impatient ring at the bell was heard, and Madame Blavatsky walked in!

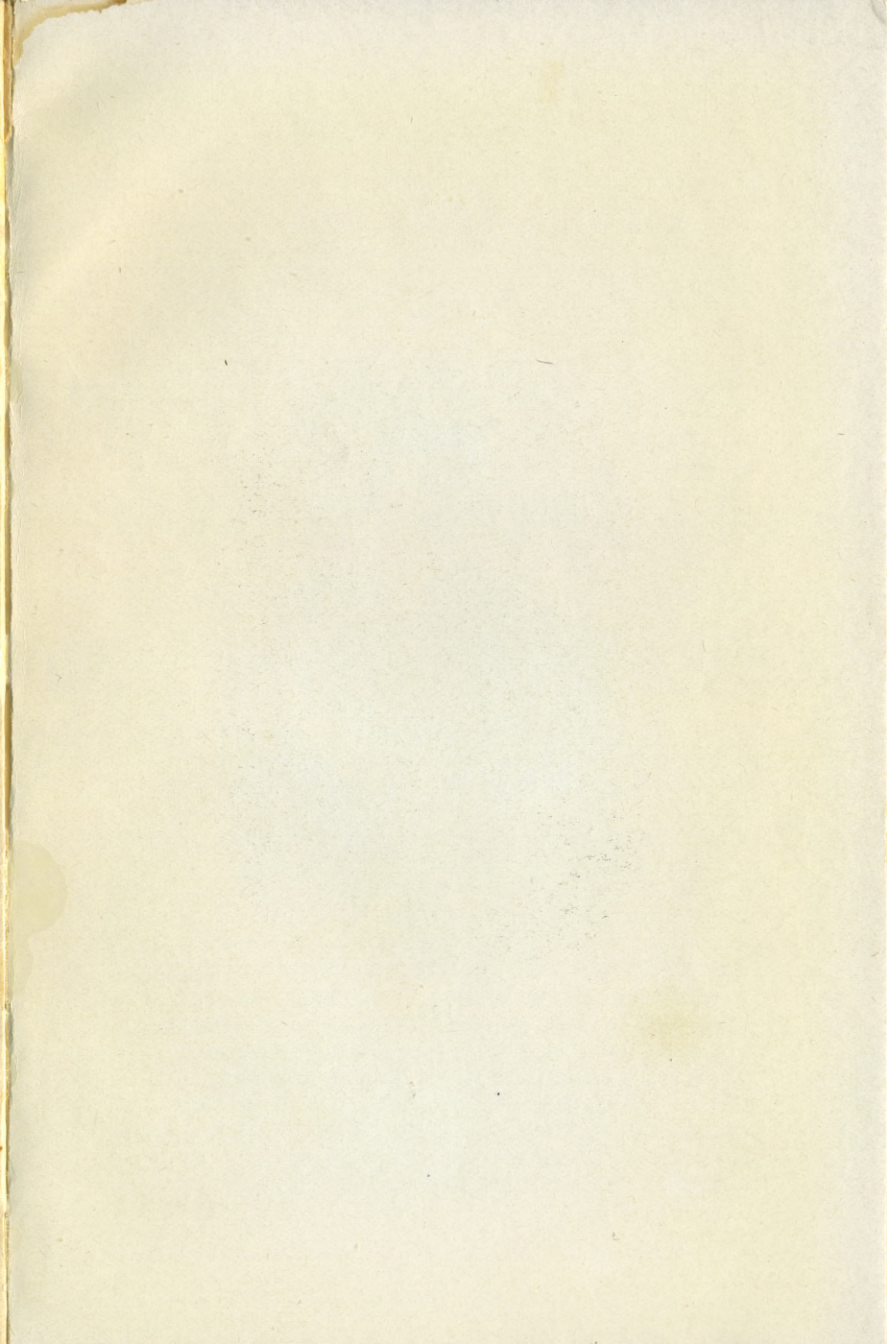
At the time of which we write (1858) Madame Blavatsky was already possessed of occult powers, and the next few years of her life, spent in Russia

with her family, were crowded with marvellous occurrences, of which she was the central figure. Mysterious raps and whisperings were constantly heard in her presence, while occasionally the most astonishing things happened. The phenomena which surrounded her were similar to those sometimes found among mediums, but, unlike the latter, Madame Blavatsky had these manifestations to a great extent under her control, and this power to control and if necessary to stop them, was one which grew stronger. She considered *mediumship*, which consists essentially in the surrender of that control, which we usually exercise, over the physical and etheric bodies in favour of some other entity or entities, to be degrading to human dignity. The following story is typical of many of the occurrences which happened at this time. Madame Blavatsky was in the drawing-room with her relatives, many of whom were sceptical as to her powers. Her brother, who believed in no one and nothing, was expressing his disbelief somewhat frankly, when Madame Blavatsky declared that she would so fix a small chess table to the floor *without touching it* that it could not be lifted. Her friends gathered eagerly round her while she fixed her eyes, with an intense gaze, upon the little table. Then, with a motion of her hand she directed one of the young men present to lift it. He stooped confidently down and seized it by the leg, but—the table was immovable, as though screwed to the floor. He was a muscular youth and disinclined to be beaten, so exerting all his strength and using his broad shoulders, he tried again, but in vain. The table seemed to be *rooted to the spot*. Her brother now stepped forward and met with no more success, although he gave the diminutive table a tremendous kick. Seeing the astonishment on the faces of all present, Madame Blavatsky with a laugh said: "Try once more."

Her brother very irresolutely approached the bewitched table; grasping it by the leg, however, he gave it a good heave up and nearly dislocated his arm owing to the useless effort, for the table was lifted like a feather this time!

Her father, Colonel Hahn, was utterly sceptical as to his daughter's marvellous powers, at which he simply laughed. One day, however, two old friends of his who had just convinced themselves absolutely of the genuineness of her psychic gifts, persuaded him to devise a test himself. The old gentleman, probably hoping to have a good laugh at their expense, proceeded into the next room and wrote a word on a slip of paper, which he folded and put in his pocket; he then returned to his game of *Patience*, quietly smiling behind his gray moustache. All the others present gathered expectantly round, while the familiar raps were heard on a plate; a young lady repeated the alphabet and at the proper letter a rap was made; Madame Blavatsky did nothing at all—apparently. Slowly, letter by letter, a word was written down—a queer word, which so puzzled them all that they felt sure there must be some mistake. "Well, what have you got?" called out Colonel Hahn. "One word—'Zaitchik'." The old gentleman's face was a study! With a trembling hand he examined the paper, muttering: "How very strange!" Then pulling out his folded paper he handed it to them in silence. It bore the same word—the name of his favourite war horse in the Turkish War years ago! From that day Colonel Hahn was firmly convinced of his daughter's gifts and studied them closely; he sought her aid in completing a history of his family, and marvelled at the completeness and accuracy with which she was able to give him, by means of her psychic powers, all the details he wanted.

Well, these are merely specimens of many wonderful tales for which readers are referred to *Incidents in the Life of Madame Blavatsky*, by Mr. Sinnett. As might be expected, the report of all these strange happenings got abroad, and Madame Blavatsky soon came to be regarded as a magician. About this time, however, she was taken seriously ill, and for days she lay like one apparently dead. She recovered, but from that time every phenomenon independent of her will entirely ceased. In her case, as in so many others, a serious illness has marked an important change in the life. The struggle of her earlier years was to obtain control over the mysterious forces of the inner side of nature which were always playing around her, and her victory seems to have coincided with this serious illness.





1870

CHAPTER IV

FROM APPRENTICESHIP TO DUTY

1867—1875

THE period of her life from 1867—70, if it could be told, would probably prove of great interest. But all that is known of these years is that they were spent in the East, and that a great increase in occult knowledge was their fruit. They mark the transition from "apprenticeship to duty" as Mr. Sinnett puts it, for Madame Blavatsky returned from the East with much of the knowledge which it was her great but enormously difficult task to re-introduce to the world.

It requires but a slight exercise of the imagination to realise something of the task which lay before Madame Blavatsky. The work of introducing to a world either entirely ignorant of, or greatly prejudiced against, the Eastern teachings which we now term Theosophy, was one which only the bravest heart and the most devoted character could carry through: but our heroine possessed these two qualities in a splendid degree. She was a Russian, and, for the most part, had to speak and write in languages that were not her own; her teachings were new and strange, and utterly opposed to many of the religious views then prevailing; not only had she to face opposition, but also, she had the great initial difficulty of finding out how and when to start. There was no Theosophical Society with its own Publishing Department waiting to receive

and propagate her teachings! She had to find the people scattered through the world who were likely to appreciate and understand her. Although Madame Blavatsky was a pupil of one of the Great Masters and was entrusted with this piece of work, we must not suppose that the precise details and methods of action were given to her; nor do we find that she herself fully understood, at first, all the teaching which, later, she was to give out so abundantly.

In 1870 she returned from the East, meeting with her customary adventures *en route*, for a dreadful explosion occurred on her ship, and she was among the very few on board who were picked out of the water. She managed to reach Cairo, where she suffered many inconveniences until money reached her from Russia. In Cairo, she found a certain number of people who were interested in Spiritualism, and concluded that it would be wise to start work among them. She hoped to show them that she herself could produce at will the phenomena which ordinarily they obtained through a medium, and thereby to awaken their interest in the deeper side of her teachings. But her efforts met with no success, as a number of quite unsuitable people attached themselves to her and speedily brought the little society into such disrepute that Madame Blavatsky severed her connection with it, although she had already given some important demonstrations of her own powers.

She again met the venerable Copt, of whom we have already spoken, and saw many of the wonders of Egypt; in particular she passed a night in the black darkness of the King's Chamber in the Great Pyramid, comfortably settled in a sarcophagus! A characteristic recreation! One other acquaintance she made at this time who ought to be mentioned, *viz.*, Madame Coulomb, then attached to a small

hotel in Cairo; years afterwards this person and her husband, finding themselves in great destitution in India, availed themselves of Madame Blavatsky's generous help, and repaid her kindness by an act of cruel ingratitude, as we shall see later on. At the end of 1872, her family at Odessa were surprised by Madame Blavatsky's unannounced return, but the bird of passage did not settle for long. In 1873 she started on her travels again, this time turning Westward for the soil in which she might plant the seeds of Eastern thought with which she was entrusted.

An incident which occurred on this journey was so characteristic of her and so similar to many others which are remembered by those who knew Madame Blavatsky, that it is well to record it here. Madame Blavatsky had taken a first-class ticket for New York, and was going on board the steamer at Havre, when she saw a poor woman with two little children, standing on the pier and weeping bitterly. "Why are you crying?" she asked. The woman replied that her husband had sent to her, from America, money to enable her and her children to join him. She had expended it all in the purchase, from a bogus Steamship Agent, of steerage tickets which turned out to be fraudulent imitations. She could not find the rogue who sold them to her, and was quite penniless in a strange city. Madame Blavatsky went to the Agent of the Steamship Company and induced him to exchange her own first-class ticket for steerage tickets for herself, the poor woman and the children. Thus it happened that our heroine travelled to America in the crowded discomfort of the steerage of a liner.

At the time of her arrival at New York (1873) a series of remarkable spiritualistic phenomena were beginning to attract much attention. William and Horatio Eddy were farmers at Chittenden,

Vermont, U.S.A.; they were poor and ill-educated, but strong mediums, and crowds of visitors came to witness the remarkable materialisations which occurred in their presence. Among these visitors was Madame Blavatsky, and, shortly after her, arrived Colonel H. S. Olcott—an apparently chance meeting, which was destined to have far-reaching effects. Their acquaintance grew into friendship, and Madame Blavatsky began to introduce to him some of the principles of the Eastern Wisdom in which she was versed.

Colonel Olcott writes that “a strange concatenation of events brought us together and united our lives for this work, under the superior direction of a group of Masters, especially of One, whose wise teaching, noble example, benevolent patience and paternal solicitude have made us regard Him with the reverence and love that a true Father inspires in his children. I am indebted to H. P. Blavatsky for making me know of the existence of these Masters and their Esoteric Philosophy; and, later on, for acting as my mediator before I had come into direct personal intercourse with them.”

Colonel Henry Steele Olcott was an officer in the American Army, who served in the war between North and South, and held an honourable position as a lawyer and writer. In him Madame Blavatsky, the teacher, found a colleague and organiser, who stood her in good stead in the following years, during which the Theosophical Society was born and began to develop.

In 1875, when it was formally founded, he was appointed its life-President, and for thirty-two years he filled that office with dignity, judgment and tact, winning the love of thousands by the sterling qualities of his heart and the noble work for humanity to which he set his hand.

CHAPTER V

BIRTH OF THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

1875—1878

IN starting the movement which was destined to do so much in breaking down the materialism of her epoch Madame Blavatsky first sought to interest those who were already aware of the phenomena of Spiritualism. Apparently her aim was to show that she could produce *at will* the phenomena with which many were becoming familiar in the séance room, and it would occupy too much space even to enumerate the wonders which she performed; those who knew her then have written fully of the world of marvel and magic in which she habitually moved at that time, yielding constantly to the demands for manifestation of her wonderful control over the unseen agencies in Nature, which waited upon her slightest wishes. It is not difficult to realise that by these means she speedily attracted the attention of a large circle of people, and this probably was the end she then had in view, for later on, when the Theosophical Society was established, she devoted herself to her true work as a Spiritual Teacher and refused to yield to the demand for "marvels".

The formation of a Society was proposed in the autumn of 1875; after some consideration its name was chosen, and at New York, on November 17th of that year, the President-Founder (Colonel Olcott) delivered his inaugural address. The original objects

of the Society were not the three with which we are now familiar, but a much more elaborate and cumbersome series of seven rules; on reading these through, however, one can trace the purpose, partially expressed, which Madame Blavatsky had in view, of bringing again to the world some of the Eastern Wisdom, and as the years passed, the unnecessary and unsuitable objects fell away, until we find the three clearly defined "objects" of the Theosophical Society. See (3)

The progress of the new Society was very slow at first, indeed after a year's work, there survived only a good organisation, a few somewhat indolent members, a certain notoriety and two friends, the Russian and the American who were in deadly earnest; who never for a moment doubted the existence of their Masters, the excellence of their mission, or its final success. The difficulties before them were enormous, but the following description of a visit paid by one of the Masters to Colonel Olcott may serve to show, on the other hand, the gracious encouragement given to the two comrades. One night Colonel Olcott was seated alone in his room quietly reading, when "all at once . . . there came a gleam of something white in the right-hand corner of my right eye; I turned my head, dropped my book in astonishment and saw, towering above me in his great stature, an Oriental, clad in white garments, and wearing a head-cloth or turban of amber-striped fabric . . . Long raven hair hung from under his turban to the shoulders; . . . he was so grand a man, so imbued with the majesty of moral strength, so luminously spiritual, so evidently above the average humanity, that I felt abashed in his presence, and bowed my head and bent on my knee as one does before a god or a god-like personage. A hand was lightly placed on my head, a sweet though strong voice bade me be

seated, and when I raised my eyes, the Presence was seated in the other chair beyond the table. He told me he had come at the crisis when I needed him; that my actions had brought me to this point; that it lay with me alone whether he and I should meet again in this life as co-workers for the good of mankind; that a great work was to be done for humanity and I had the right to share in it if I wished; that a mysterious tie, not now to be explained to me, had drawn my colleague and myself together; a tie which could not be broken, however strained it might be at times . . . How long he was there I cannot tell . . . but at last he rose, I wondering at his great height, and observing the sort of splendour in his countenance—not an external shining, but the soft gleam, as it were, of an inner light—that of the spirit, and . . . benignant-ly saluting me in farewell, he was gone.

“To run and beat at H. P. B.’s door and tell her my experience was the first natural impulse . . . I returned to my room to think, and the gray morning found me still thinking and resolving. Out of those thoughts and those resolves developed all my subsequent Theosophical activities, and that loyalty to the Masters behind our movement which the rudest shocks and the cruellest disillusioning have never shaken.”¹

In the summer of 1875, *Isis Unveiled* was commenced and 1877 saw it published. The account of the writing of it as given by Colonel Olcott, who worked with Madame Blavatsky on the book, is but one more link in a chain of marvels. With a reference library of scarcely one hundred volumes she yet produced a book which suggests the free use of a Museum. Whence did she get this knowledge? How did she produce such a book? Here

¹ *Old Diary Leaves*, Vol. I, p. 380.

are her own words on the matter: "During the long years of my absence from home, I have constantly studied and have learned certain things. But when I wrote *Isis* I wrote it so easily that it was certainly no labour, but a real pleasure . . . I never put to myself the question, 'Can I write on this subject?' . . . for whenever I write upon a subject I know little of, I address myself to *Them* and one of *Them* inspires me." Again she writes: "I live in a kind of permanent enchantment, a life of visions and sights with open eyes and no trance whatever to deceive my senses . . . For several years, in order not to forget what I have learned elsewhere, I have been made to have permanently before my eyes all that I need to see. Thus, night and day, the images of the past are ever marshalled before my inner eye. Slowly, and gliding silently, like images in an enchanted panorama, centuries appear before me . . . and every important, and often unimportant event . . . remains photographed in my mind as though impressed in indelible colours . . . I certainly refuse point-blank to attribute it to my own knowledge or memory, for I could never arrive alone at either such premises or conclusions."

In 1878, it was decided that the Founders should journey to India; the Society was beginning to spread, a branch having been formed in London, and a number of Indian members having been enrolled. Their steamer carried them first to London, whence they transhipped for Bombay, where a Headquarters was soon established.

CHAPTER VI
WORK IN INDIA

1878—1884

A BUNGALOW in the native quarters of Bombay was chosen by the Founders for the Theosophical headquarters, and before many weeks had passed, their rooms were thronged daily with native visitors, eager to discuss religious questions with Madame Blavatsky and to hear her explanations of their own ancient Scriptures. It is surely a striking testimony to the value of Theosophy that it can help equally the followers of various Faiths, for just as Hindus, Buddhists, Parsees and others flocked round Madame Blavatsky, so, in the present day, do they gather round Mrs. Besant to hear her lectures, while many earnest Christians find the greatest possible help in her words and writings. Theosophy flows out from the Source of all Religions and so each Faith is benefited by its coming.

The early days in Bombay were not easy, for Madame Blavatsky arrived in India with many misconceptions as to the British administration of India, and made no efforts to be introduced into European society. Being a Russian, and moving solely among the natives, it was not strange that the police grew a little suspicious as to her motives, fearing that she might be a secret agent of the Russian Government; they accordingly annoyed her exceedingly by setting a detective to watch her movements. This was done in such a very obvious

and clumsy way and was such an absurd proceeding, that the unfortunate detective led an unhappy life, and in a very short time no more was heard or thought of the Russian spy scare.

The early days of the Society, like the olden days when the world was young, were made happy by the frequent appearances and help of the great Founders whom Madame Blavatsky served. Thus, as Colonel Olcott tells us, at Bombay, in their peaceful retreat, he and Madame Blavatsky were visited in person by the Teachers and made to realise more strongly than ever that they were not alone in their work, but were being watched and aided at every turn.

One very important step was taken shortly after their arrival in India. Mr. A. P. Sinnett, then editor of the *Pioneer*, the principal Anglo-Indian newspaper, wrote asking for information about their objects and for an introduction to Madame Blavatsky. Mr. Sinnett's interest in the movement at this very early stage was of great value, for he was in touch with, and highly respected by, the best Anglo-Indian society. The first meetings were not immediately satisfactory, owing, doubtless, to the peculiarities of her disposition, but enough ground was gone over to show that Madame Blavatsky was the possessor of, or in touch with, great stores of occult learning, and many demonstrations were given of her possession of wonderful psychic powers. During a visit which the two Founders paid to Mr. and Mrs. Sinnett at Simla there occurred the remarkable events recorded in *The Occult World*—the first book which Mr. Sinnett contributed to the library of Theosophical literature.

Before long, Mr. Sinnett saw through the outer peculiarities of Madame Blavatsky's temperament, and realised, as he himself has put it, "the splendour of her psychic gifts, her indomitable courage,

which carried her through overwhelming dangers of all kinds, and her spiritual enthusiasm, which made all suffering and toil as dust in the balance compared with her allegiance to her unseen Masters ". Through her he himself was given the privilege of communicating with the Masters, from Whom he received the letters upon which to base his work, *Esoteric Buddhism*, the first book which gave any clear and orderly presentation of Theosophy.

Their sphere of influence extended so rapidly, and they were so overwhelmed by correspondence, that the Founders decided to start a magazine, as an organ through which to speak. Accordingly, in October, 1879, *The Theosophist* was launched, and paid its way from the first.

The Founders visited many places in India, establishing branches wherever they went and arousing public interest in their work; everywhere they sought to inspire the true spirit of patriotism among the natives, by explaining to them the beauty and dignity of their own religions and the greatness of their ancient nation; in Ceylon, which was also visited, they were enthusiastically welcomed, for the people saw in them the first European champions of Buddhism. Leaving the steamer which conveyed them to Colombo, Col. Olcott writes: "We embarked in a large boat, decorated with plantain trees and lines of bright-coloured flowers, on which were the leading Buddhists of the place, . . . on the jetty and on the beach a huge crowd awaited us, and rent the air with the united shout of 'Sadhoo, Sadhoo'. A white cloth was spread for us from the jetty steps to the road, where carriages were ready, and a thousand flags were frantically waved in welcome . . . The roads were blocked with people and our progress was very slow. At the house three Chief Priests received and blessed us at the threshold, reciting appropriate Pāli verses.

Then we had a levée and innumerable introductions; the common people crowding every approach, filling every door and gazing through every window. This went on all day, to our great annoyance, for we could not get a breath of fresh air, but it was all so strong a proof of friendliness that we put up with it as best we could . . . Every now and then a new procession of yellow-robed monks, arranged in order of seniority of ordination, and each carrying his palm leaf fan, came to visit and bless us. It was an intoxicating experience altogether, a splendid augury of our future relations with the nation.”¹

It was during these long and fatiguing tours with Madame Blavatsky that Colonel Olcott commenced the wonderful series of cures by mesmeric passes for which he became famous throughout India. This fame became almost a nuisance, because at every town or village at which they stayed the Colonel was literally besieged by applicants suffering from all sorts of pains and troubles. An incident which occurred at Tinnevely is typical and well worth quoting. “I had gone to the Pagoda,” Colonel Olcott writes, “and was followed by at least a thousand idlers, who, for lack of better amusement, watched my every step, and exchanged opinions on my personal appearance. A young man of twenty-five or thirty was brought to me through the press, by his father, with a prayer that I would restore his speech which he had lost three years before. Having neither elbow-room nor breathing space, I climbed up on the continuous pedestal or basement that supports a long line of monolithic carved figures of Hindu deities, drew the patient up after me, called for silence and made the father tell the people about the case.” Then the Colonel laid his hands on the unfortunate dumb man and made

¹ *Old Diary Leaves*, Vol. II, p. 158.

seven circular passes on the head, and seven long passes, and in less than five minutes speech was restored, and the Colonel made the young man shout at the top of his voice the names of Hindu deities. A scene of intense enthusiasm followed.

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In the midst of all this activity a house-boat journey made by the Founders with some colleagues, came as a welcome change. Madame Blavatsky was in good health and spirits, and the quiet days of restful voyaging through the country, silent, save when passing an occasional town, must have been very refreshing to the two Pioneers. Their hopes at this time in regard to the future of the work on which they were engaged, were not so much that a strong and wide-spreading society might be formed, but rather that Theosophical ideas might gradually colour and influence modern thought and opinion. Comparatively old people as they were, they could scarcely have hoped to build up the wide-branching Society which they nevertheless succeeded in developing in the next ten years.

The latter end of 1882 was marked by the grave illness of Madame Blavatsky at Bombay. The strain of constant labour, travelling and misrepresentation, and her natural excitability of temperament, combined to bring about a collapse. She was directed to go north *via* Darjeeling to meet her occult Guardians, and although she only spent two or three days with them she returned practically well again.

In their wanderings in India the Founders had always kept a look-out for a suitable home for the Society; at the end of 1882 they came upon just the place they wanted. This was at Adyar, a suburb of Madras, where they saw and purchased the property which is now so well known as the Headquarters of the Theosophical Society, and the home of its President.

CHAPTER VII

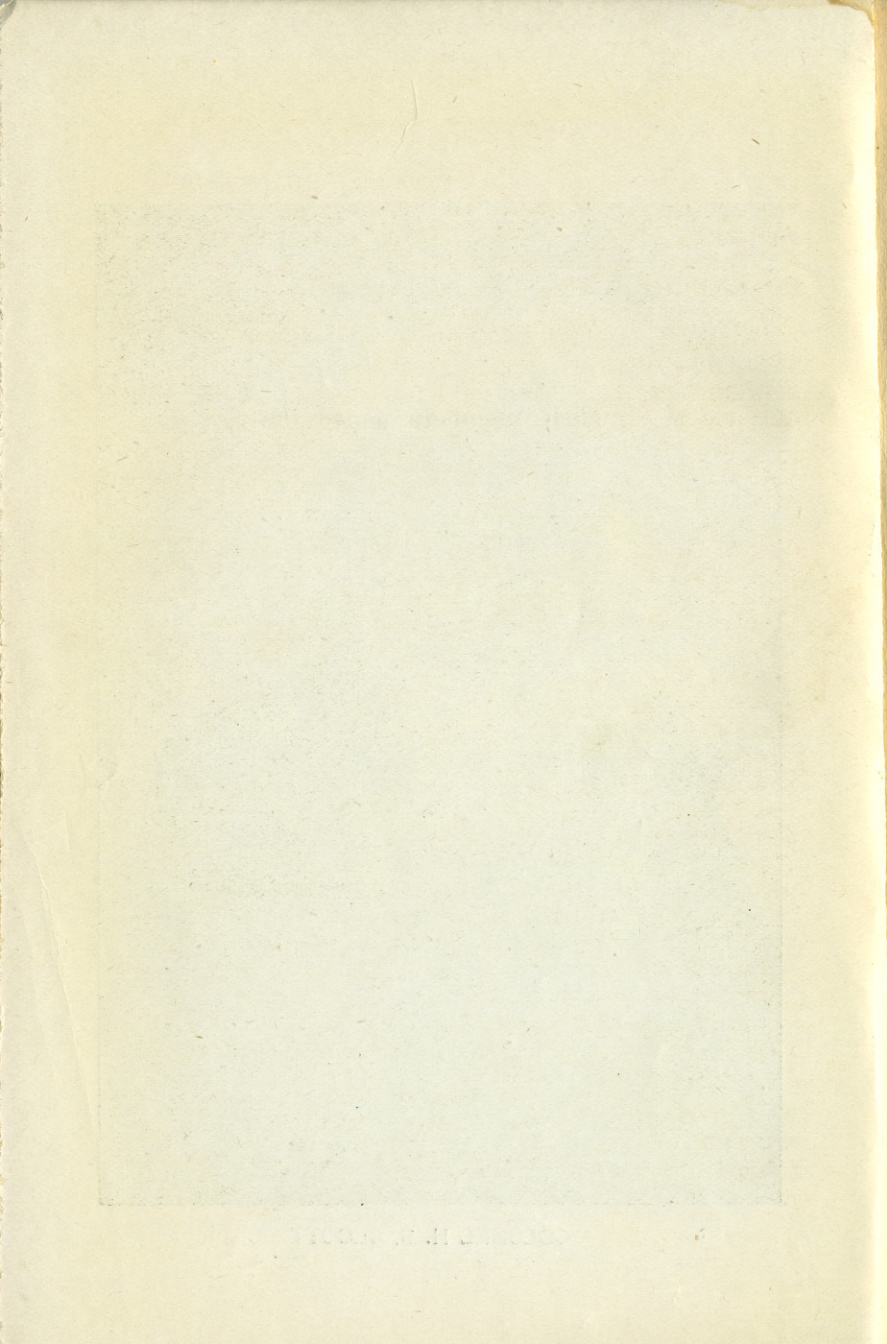
WORK IN EUROPE

1884—1887

AFTER the illness and sudden cure referred to in our last chapter it was decided that Madame Blavatsky should take a trip to Europe, to try to establish herself in health again, and at the last moment Colonel Olcott joined her. She went to Naples first, and then to Paris, where she met many Theosophists from all parts of Europe and from America, and also some of her own Russian relatives. Countess Wachtmeister, who met her then for the first time, gives some very interesting descriptions of those days, when many celebrated men and women gathered round her to listen to and join in her conversation, and, perchance, to witness some of the remarkable phenomena which so frequently occurred in her presence. Of H. P. B. (as her pupils came to call her) at this time, the Countess writes that "her features were instinct with power, and expressed an innate nobility of character that more than filled the anticipations I had formed; but what chiefly arrested my attention was the steady gaze of her wonderful grey eyes, piercing yet calm and inscrutable; they shone with a serene light which seemed to penetrate and unveil the secrets of the heart". H. P. B., the teacher, occultist and philosopher of later years, supported by a devoted band of loyal pupils, was a finer character than the impetuous and excitable Russian of former days; but



COLONEL H. S. OLCOTT



rather than a mere feeling of wonder at this, should we not be moved to deeper love and reverence for one who was strong enough to overcome the difficulties *within* herself as well as those which thronged her path in the world without?

H. P. B. crossed to London in the summer of 1884, and attracted a great deal of attention to herself and to the movement she served. A few of our oldest English members joined the Society during this visit and a larger number during the last three years of her life (1888—1891), which were spent in London.

One of the greatest trials and sorrows of her life of which we must now speak, fell upon her during this first London visit. Readers will remember that she met a certain Madame Coulomb and her husband in Cairo, long before the Theosophical Society was founded, and that she felt herself under a certain obligation to them because of some little assistance they gave her while she was waiting for money to reach her from Russia. Later on these two people came to her in Bombay, where they were stranded, penniless, and in great difficulties, and H. P. B. took them into her own household, where they were given the posts of stewards, looking after household matters and living in comfort. They were maintained in their positions at Adyar when the headquarters were removed there, but, unhappily, Madame Coulomb's former affection for Madame Blavatsky suffered a sea-change and she became her enemy, seeking to injure H. P. B. in any way she could. Her opportunity came when H. P. B. left India for Europe.

The whole trouble centred round the phenomena which H. P. B. had so lavishly displayed. Madame Coulomb supplied to the Editor of a Christian magazine at Madras a series of letters, purporting to have

been written to her by Madame Blavatsky, which, if genuine, would have shown her to have employed Madame Coulomb and her husband as confederates in producing some of these phenomena. They further supported their case by showing Madame Blavatsky's room at Adyar, in which was found a clumsy arrangement of sliding panels, etc., by means of which, they alleged, the wonders had been worked. I have no space in which to go into details regarding these charges, but I am glad and proud to say (as other members of the Society must be) that one of the first acts, after her election, of our new President, Mrs. Besant, was to publish a full and complete defence of H. P. B.¹ H. P. B. at once denied that the letters had ever been written by her, but, to their shame be it said, those who accused her never even allowed her to see them! While, with regard to the sliding panels, etc., Mrs. Besant shows conclusively, from the testimony of many who were on the spot, that these must have been put up *after* Madame Blavatsky left Adyar for Europe, and while the Coulombs, as housekeepers, had charge of the establishment.

It was long, however, before a full and correct account of these occurrences was obtainable, and in the meantime a great blow had been dealt at the Theosophical Movement, which wellnigh crushed it. On Madame Blavatsky, of course, fell the brunt of the storm and the suffering. Only a few of her friends in the West were faithful to her, but in the East, where Madame Blavatsky returned for a brief visit, the majority of the members stood by her. Her health, however, completely broke down again and she returned to Europe.

Out of misfortunes, however, some good speedily began to come. In the days of enforced quiet, while

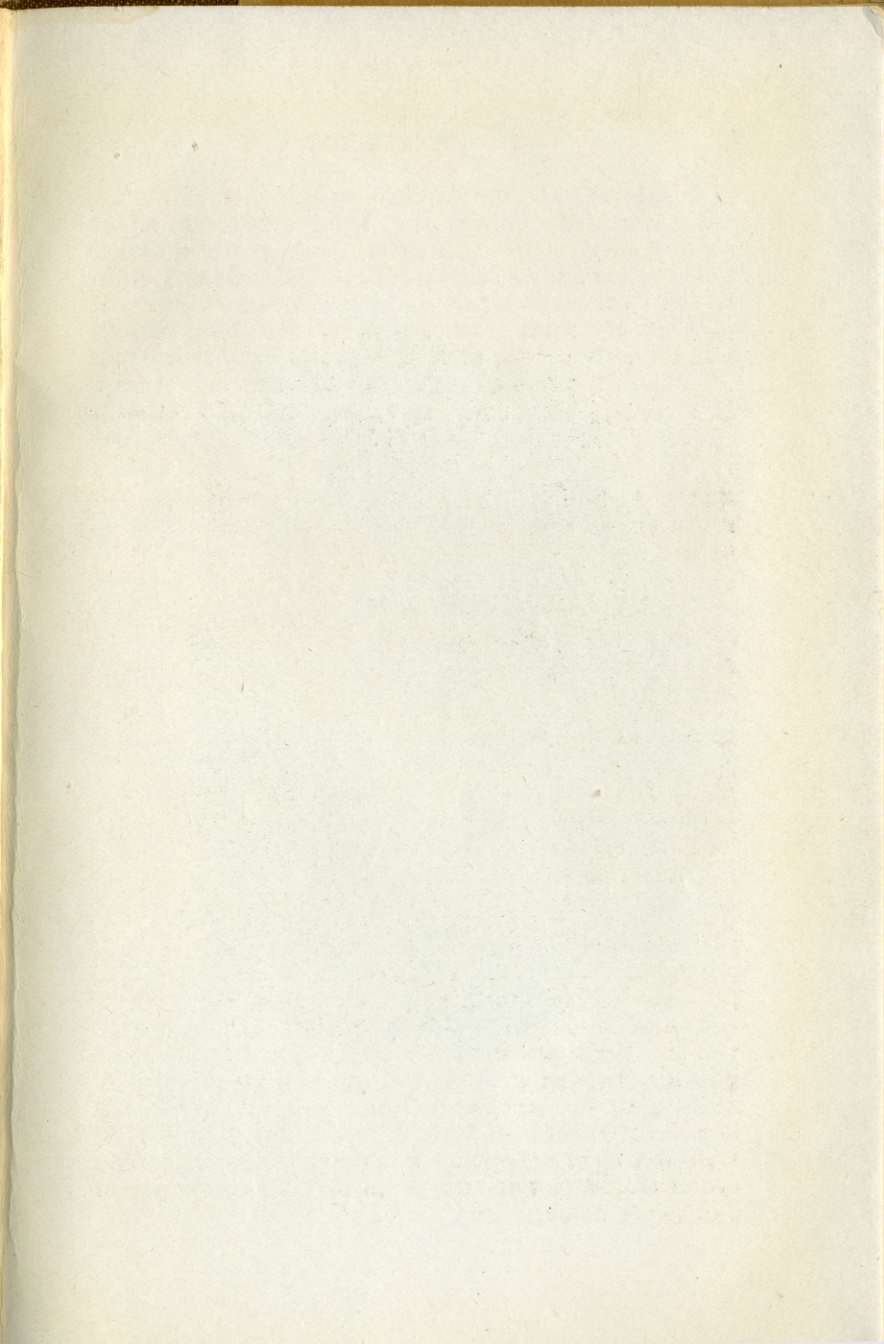
¹ *H. P. B. and the Masters of Wisdom*. Annie Besant. (London: Theosophical Publishing Society.)

the work seemed stunned by the blow which had fallen upon it and the disturbances which followed, the fountain of the Ancient Wisdom began to flow more fully than ever before for H. P. B., and she felt that by her writings she might justify herself and draw the Movement together. She was right, for her writings from that time to her death are those by which her memory will live and the Society will grow.

Reminiscences of Madame Blavatsky, by Countess Wachtmeister, now furnishes us with accounts of the next few years of H. P. B.'s life in Europe. At the end of 1885, the Countess went to live with Madame Blavatsky at Würzburg, learning that she was in need of care and companionship. The following description of a single day will serve to indicate the routine of her life at this time. By seven in the morning Madame Blavatsky was at her desk writing, with only a pause for breakfast, until one o'clock, when sometimes she would stop for dinner, but at other times her door would remain closed for hours longer, to the despair of the maid, who bemoaned the spoilt food. At seven o'clock writing was laid aside and the rest of the evening was spent pleasantly with the Countess until nine, when H. P. B. went to bed, where she would surround herself with her Russian newspapers and read them till a late hour.

The work on which Madame Blavatsky was engaged at this time was *The Secret Doctrine*, the writing of which was a long and arduous labour, requiring the greatest possible freedom from distractions of any kind. As with *Isis Unveiled*, Madame Blavatsky was constantly helped in this work by the Masters, who dictated to her, wrote for her occasionally, or showed her ancient events and scenes, descriptions of which were required. As in the former work, quotations and references were made to books which Madame Blavatsky had

not and could not have had at hand. But indeed the only way to gain an idea of the greatness of this work is to read it. In it, for the first time, are translated stanzas from the mysterious *Book of Dzyan*, which contains the record of the life-history of our earth and the system to which we belong, since its birth, myriads of years ago. Only the eye of a seer can understand and translate into speech this record; Madame Blavatsky did so translate parts of it and added to it commentaries and explanations of her own and other people's, and as a result we have in *The Secret Doctrine* perhaps the grandest picture of evolution ever penned. But the strenuous work involved in the production of *The Secret Doctrine*—a work which kept Madame Blavatsky chained to her desk week-in and week-out with scarcely a break for out-door exercise—told very heavily on her health. She moved from Würzburg to Ostend, whither Countess Wachtmeister accompanied her. Matters grew worse there, and two doctors had to be called in; they held out no hope of recovery and only marvelled that H. P. B. had lived so long with the complicated disorders from which she suffered. One night matters reached a crisis; H. P. B. herself thought that the time had come for her to lay down her body, and told the Countess, who was sitting up with her, how glad she was at the prospect of being free from so worn-out an instrument, although she had hoped to give more to the world. At last she dropped off into a state of unconsciousness, and the Countess gave herself over to sad reflections as to the apparent uselessness of all Madame Blavatsky's self-sacrifice and suffering, for the work seemed too weak to continue without her, who was the very life-blood of it. At last, worn out with the inevitable fatigues of nursing and her own sorrowful thoughts, the Countess herself sank into unconsciousness.





1890

"When I opened my eyes," she writes, "the early morning light was stealing in, and a dire apprehension came over me that I had slept, and that perhaps H. P. B. had died during my sleep. . . . I turned round towards the bed in horror and there I saw H. P. B. looking at me calmly with her clear, grey eyes, as she said : 'Countess, come here.' I flew to her side. 'What has happened, H. P. B., you look so different from what you did last night?' She replied : 'Yes, *Master* has been here ; He gave me my choice, that I might die, and be free if I would, or I might live and finish *The Secret Doctrine*. He told me how great would be my sufferings, and what a terrible time I would have before me in England (for I am to go there) ; but when I thought of those students to whom I shall be permitted to teach a few things, and of the Theosophical Society in general, to which I have already given my heart's blood, I accepted the sacrifice,'"—and there are many now in England and abroad who bless her every day of their lives for this sacrifice which brought Theosophy to them when they might never otherwise have heard of it.

CHAPTER VIII

WORK IN ENGLAND

1887—1891

THE grave illness at Ostend, from which Madame Blavatsky so marvellously recovered, was followed by four years of strenuous work in London—work which formed the foundation for many of our well-established activities. *The Secret Doctrine* was gradually completed and finally published ; it stands alone in our literature, head and shoulders above any other books we have, a veritable mine to which the student may return over and over again and always find something new and precious. Then H. P. B. translated *The Voice of the Silence*, a book which comes from early Buddhist days and which mellows the wisdom of its words by that atmosphere of compassion which is so characteristic of the Buddha's teaching. *The Key to Theosophy* was also written, and *Lucifer*, now known as *The Theosophical Review*, was started and edited by H. P. B. for nearly four years. Besides these literary activities, and owing to the stimulus of her presence, the whole of the movement in England, which had been confined almost entirely to London, grew and flourished exceedingly.

This was a wonderful record of work to be done with such a worn-out body ; but in addition to it H. P. B. continued the perhaps still more important task of training pupils, so that the movement might

be carried on when she left. The Blavatsky Lodge was formed, and before long a wide circle of pupils and sympathisers gathered round her, amongst whom were some of the best of our English workers.

On first coming to London a house in Norwood was taken, but it was soon found too small and inconvenient, and a move was made to Lansdowne Road, where a larger house was taken. Madame Blavatsky occupied rooms on the ground floor; for twelve hours a day she would work at her desk, and in the evening would receive visitors—strangely varied visitors they were too; well known men of science, learned professors, literary men, agnostics and socialists, artists, all finding something of attraction in this wonderful Russian woman whose profound knowledge commanded attention and respect. On Thursday evenings she would be present at the meeting of the Blavatsky Lodge and answer questions in elucidation of different points in her writings.

Among these visitors came Mrs. Besant, to whom *The Secret Doctrine* had been given for review. She wrote asking for an interview with Madame Blavatsky, and in due course presented herself at the door of 17, Lansdowne Road. Mrs. Besant writes: "A pause, a swift passing through hall and outer room and folding-doors thrown back, a figure in a large chair before a table, a voice, vibrant, compelling: 'My dear Mrs. Besant, I have so long wished to see you,' and I was standing with my hand in her firm grip, and looking for the first time in this life straight into the eyes of 'H. P. Blavatsky'. I was conscious of a sudden leaping forth of my heart—was it a recognition?—and then, I am ashamed to say, a fierce rebellion, a fierce withdrawal, as of some wild animal when it feels a mastering hand. I sat down, after some introductions that conveyed no ideas to me, and listened. She talked of travels, of various countries, easy brilliant talk, her eyes veiled, her

exquisitely moulded fingers rolling cigarettes incessantly. Nothing special to record, no word of occultism, nothing mysterious, a woman of the world chatting with her evening visitors. We rose to go, and for a moment the veil lifted, and two brilliant, piercing eyes met mine, and with a yearning throb in the voice: 'Oh my dear Mrs. Besant, if you would only come among us!' I felt a well-nigh uncontrollable desire to bend down and kiss her, under the compulsion of that yearning voice, those compelling eyes, but with a flash of the old unbending pride and an inward jeer at my own folly, I said a commonplace polite good-bye, and turned away with some inanely courteous and evasive remark. 'Child,' she said to me long afterwards, 'your pride is terrible; you are as proud as Lucifer himself.' But truly I think I never showed it to her again after that first evening, though it sprang up wrathfully in her defence many and many a time, until I learned the pettiness and the worthlessness of all criticism, and knew that the blind were objects of compassion, not of scorn."

Before long Lansdowne Road was outgrown and a move was made at Mrs. Besant's invitation to her house in Avenue Road. A lecture hall was built beside the house and No. 19, Avenue Road, became the headquarters of the Society in London for a dozen years, until it was moved nearer the centre of London.

Avenue Road was the last home of the body known as Madame Blavatsky, for here, on May 8th, 1891, it was laid aside finally, but not until the movement in England had been placed on a firm footing and pupils had been found to carry on the work to which she had devoted her life. "Endurance and patience," says Mrs. Besant, "have certainly been the crowning qualities of H. P. B. as I have known her during the last years of her life . . .

The most salient of her characteristics was implied in these crowning qualities; it was that of strength, steady strength, unyielding as a rock. I have seen weaklings dash themselves up against her and then whimper that she was hard; but I have also seen her face to face with a woman who had been her cruel enemy, but who was in distress, and every feature was radiant with a divine compassion which only did not forgive because it would not admit that it had been outraged."

H. P. B. was in a very real sense the mother of the Theosophical Society; the seeds of Spiritual Truth which she came to sow required tender care and protection ere they could sprout and grow into healthy plants, and that fostering care she gave, taking upon herself all the storm and stress, so that within this shell there might be peace. Every spiritual movement seems to be mothered in this way by some great Soul who walls it round with shielding arms, in its early stages, and breathes into it the living warmth of Spiritual Life. As a mother gives her life to a child, so did H. P. B. identify her life with that of her child—the Society she founded—and we who belong to it, although we may not have seen H. P. B. in this life, should ever think of her in this way. H. P. B. is as much as ever a beneficent power in the Theosophical movement, and by keeping her memory green we shall be more likely to know her when she takes up her work again on the physical plane in years to come; in the meantime we have all, even the youngest of us, work for Theosophy that we can do, whether by thought or by word or by action, and one of our motives for doing it loyally and as well as we can, might very well be that when H. P. B. *does* come back, the Theosophical movement may be strong and healthy and ready for the Leader.

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The Theosophical Society

OBJECTS

To form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour.

To encourage the study of comparative religion, philosophy and science.

To investigate unexplained laws of nature and the powers latent in man.

Any person desiring information as to the Theosophical Society is invited to communicate with the General Secretary, Theosophical Society, London.

THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY is composed of students, belonging to any religion in the world or to none, who are united by their approval of the above objects, by their wish to remove religious antagonisms and to draw together men of good-will whatsoever their religious opinions, and by their desire to study religious truths and to share the results of their studies with others. Their bond of union is not the profession of a common belief, but a common search and aspiration for Truth. They hold that Truth should be sought by study, by reflection, by purity of life, by devotion to high ideals,

and they regard Truth as a prize to be striven for, not as a dogma to be imposed by authority. They consider that belief should be the result of individual study or intuition, and not its antecedent, and should rest on knowledge, not on assertion. They extend tolerance to all, even to the intolerant, not as a privilege they bestow, but as a duty they perform, and they seek to remove ignorance, not to punish it. They see every religion as an expression of the DIVINE WISDOM, and prefer its study to its condemnation, and its practice to proselytism. Peace is their watch-word, as Truth is their aim.

